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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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SECURITY INFORMATION

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SOURCE:

TERRAIN FEATURES AND CLIMATIC CONDITIONSSummer Season

1. In the Gorkiy region the Volga River is generally shallow on the north side and deep on the south side. Furthermore, there are numerous shoals, or bars, in the stream bed. For this reason the channel is marked during the summertime with numerous light buoys. In the spring the river overflows its north bank, becoming several kilometers wide so that this buoy marking is not possible. As a result of the strong current, upstream barges and tugboats leave the river channel and become grounded. We often noted that such grounded craft could be freed only after days of work.

Winter Season

2. With the exception of small, very strong-current areas, the Volga River freezes over in the winter, so that all boat traffic must cease. At sudden temperature drops of 20 to 25 degrees C, a part of the often crowded Gorkiy street traffic is extended to the ice surface. The ice layer is so strong that even the heaviest trucks can drive on its surface. Normally, however, the surface is composed of overlapping ice layers, so that only sleighs and pedestrian traffic are possible. The

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above situation also applies to the Oka River, which empties into the Volga at this point, but I believe the Oka was utilized more frequently because of its slower current, and more even freezing.

3. The formation of ice along the banks during the latter part of October means that even the introduction of ice-breakers and the maintenance of an open channel cannot prolong shipping traffic. However, we noticed a constant use of ice-breakers in the months of November and December 1950, although normal ship traffic had ceased. This was attributed to the construction of a dam in the Zhiguli Mountains (N53-30, E49-40) near Kazan. During the winter the ships lay up in coves, where they freeze in until spring. Overhauling in a shipyard apparently occurs every couple of years.

Shipping Season

4. River traffic ceases in the last half of October and begins in the middle of April. Nevertheless, upstream traffic is still difficult in April because of high water and very strong current. The water level of the Volga changes constantly throughout the year. Therefore only floating docks are used. When these are put into the water or brought up on land, the shipping traffic automatically begins or ends.

SHIPPING TRAFFIC ON THE VOLGA

Types of River Craft

5. Shipping traffic on the Volga continues day and night. An estimate of 50 ships travelling in each direction daily may be too low rather than too high. There are passenger steamers which handle the traffic to Astrakhan; steamers for passenger and for freight traffic (blue-white-blue smoke stacks); and tugboat steamers for pure freight traffic (red-white-red smoke stacks). In the passenger service there are nearly as many motor launches with screw propellers as there are paddle steamers. In the last two years (1949 and 1950) the number of tankers with screw propellers steadily increased; the latter ones are said to have been built in the Krasnoye Sormovo shipyards in Gorkiy. We were told by the Soviets that the steamers still dated from the tsarist period, but that all were overhauled and outfitted with new power plant machinery.

Steamers

6. I only became acquainted with the steamers for the local runs. These ships have four passenger classes. The first and second class have cabins with a sleeping room in each for two persons. Third and fourth class are located below deck and have bench seats. The steamer on which we went to Vasil'evsk had approximately twenty cabins for second and first class. About 150 people could be accommodated in third and fourth class. I cannot make any estimate of the freight hold capacity of this ship, but during our trip between 50 and 100 tons was loaded in and out of the craft. I estimate that our steamer, the GLEB USPENSKIY, was 50 to 60 meters long and 10 to 15 meters wide. The transit steamers to Astrakhan are even larger.

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Smaller steamers without cabins ply between Gorkiy and Rabotki.

Tugs and Barges

7. In the tugboat category I noticed the greatest differences in size. One often saw a small tugboat with a tugload of three or four barges rigged side by side, struggle upstream, but scarcely moving because of the strong current. There were also large tugs with lengths of 40 to 50 meters. Almost without exception tug craft was loaded going upstream and traveled empty downstream. In contrast to tug traffic on German rivers, where barges are linked behind each other, on the Volga as many barges as possible are rigged side by side for tugging.

Self-propelled Tankers

8. I can only make an estimate of the tonnage capacity of the self-propelled tankers. They were approximately 60 meters long and 10 to 15 meters wide. On the downstream journey they rose two to three meters out of the water, and on the upstream trip they lay in the water near the deck level. I would assume that their payload was approximately 1000 to 1500 tons.

Freight Transports

9. The only freight transports which I observed going downstream were timber floats of more than 100 meters in length and 20 to 30 meters in width. These had a tugboat in front and another free moving tug on the side or in the rear. The number of these floats would not exceed 20 per year. We once saw one of these floats torn apart in the vicinity of Karpovka. Boats appeared from all sides and attempted to capture some of the dislodged and free floating timbers. Even our residence director, PETROV, participated eagerly in this piracy. As was later explained to us, this does not constitute thievery, as everyone has the right to claim possession of goods floating free in the water.

VOLGA RIVER PORTS

10. I have seen or become familiar with the following ports and docking points along the Volga:

Gorkiy

The harbor (Rechnoy Voksal) is located on the right Oka-Volga River bank directly at the junction of the two rivers. Essentially it serves only passenger traffic. Passenger steamers to Astrakhan and Moscow depart from here, and local traffic up and down the Volga as well as up the Oka also originates at this point. At least ten steamers are berthed here all the time, and an average of three depart regularly each hour.

Box (N56-22, E44-03)

This port does not lie in the normal steamer routes, and appears to be employed only in the ferry service from Gorkiy.

Novaya

A fishing village is located here. Only passenger service is conducted at this village.

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Moletova

This port attracted my attention because of the large dredging equipment situated here, but I did not notice any loading derricks at this point.

Kstovo (N56-11, E44-11)

A large elevator for grains and other food products is located here. A loading installation was in the process of construction in 1950. A freight barge waited here in vain for several weeks in the summer of 1950 to pick up a cargo, but loading facilities were not completed. A power dredger worked here throughout the summer of 1950.

Velikiy Vrag (N55-14, E44-32)

I noticed only passenger traffic at this point.

Parishkaya Komsomol (Pamyat Parizhskoy Komsomoly) (N56-06, E44-31)

I noticed only passenger traffic at this point.

Rabotki (N56-03, E44-38)

Grain elevators similar to those in Kstovo were seen here. The port was perhaps more developed than the one in Kstovo, and engaged in more active shipping traffic. I did not become aware of any special industrial installations.

Lyskovo (N55-13, E35-29)

I saw this harbor only at night. One has the impression that considerable ship traffic occurs here. There are several large landings and piers present, and larger buildings appear to line the port.

Barmino (N56-07, E45-30)

This community has a small landing dock, but many crates and barrels from Vasil'sursk were unloaded here.

Vasil'sursk

This is the terminus of the Gorkiy local traffic. Only one landing dock exists, so that several steamers have to lie next to another, and await their turn. There are also landing decks for freight barges. Industry appears to exist only in small volume. The Sura River, which flows into the Volga at this point, is hardly 100 meters wide, and there were no signs of riverboat traffic, although the channel is marked. To my knowledge the Gorkiyoblast line is located near here. The town itself has perhaps 10,000 residents. Because of the scenic beauty of the area many convalescent homes are located here.

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